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A Pragmatic Paradox Inherent in Expert Reports Addressed to Lay Citizens

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ABSTRACT : This paper addresses a problem inherent in *reporting* as a mode of communication between experts and lay citizens. The potential utility of such reports is obvious, but we commonly encounter critically debilitating frustration as experts, trained to address and to be accountable to other experts, attempt to report to citizens engaged in public decision making with proper regard for their own autonomy. We may move toward some resolution to these frustrations if we better understand the obligations inherent in the ordinary communicative act of *reporting*, which by its nature involves a delegation of responsibility.

KEYWORDS: expert reports, normative structure of reporting, autonomy, lay critical evaluation.

No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarch managed in the interest of the few. And the enlightenment must proceed in ways which force the administrative specialists to take account of the needs. The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses.

The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public. We have asserted that this improvement depends essentially upon freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry and of dissemination of their conclusions. Inquiry, indeed, is a work which devolves upon experts. But their expertness is not shown in framing and executing policies, but in discovering and making known the facts upon which the former depend. They are technical experts in the sense that scientific investigator and artists manifest *expertise*. It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigation; what is required is that they have the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns.* (John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927).

*This statement can be read as a call for training the many to critically assess expert statements. But it is, I submit, better understood as calling for a collaborative practice within which discourse from experts is profoundly calculated to enable the many to “judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied” and in which the many are prepared to critically appreciate and utilized the “knowledge supplied.”

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses a problem inherent in *reporting* as a mode of communication between experts and lay citizens. The potential utility of such reports is obvious. Citizens, as lay persons attempting to participate responsibly in public decision-making activities, typically need to rely on reports from experts, and by reason of their epistemic superiority, experts often acquire knowledge relevant to public concerns, which they rightly take themselves to be responsible to

report to the larger lay public. It seems, then, that delegating responsibility to experts for preparing reports for lay citizens would satisfy complementary needs and obligations.

However, the situation is complicated by the demands autonomy imposes on the lay citizen and by the nature of the expert's knowledge base. A morally competent citizen exercises self-reliance. In matters for which she bears responsibility, her decisions are to be based primarily on her own thought and experience. If she is to make responsible use of expert reports, she must in some sense be able to appropriate what they tell her, so that it becomes part of a matter which she has thought through. But the expert's report, presented in terms which would enable an expert colleague to assess its epistemic quality, typically is beyond the competence and practical capacity of ordinary citizens to fully evaluate. So, we commonly encounter critically debilitating frustration as experts, trained to address and to be accountable to other experts, attempt to report to self-reliant citizens engaged in public decision making and rightfully jealous their own autonomy.

Tensions inherent in communication between experts and lay persons have been productively studied from various perspectives. The predominant approach views the problem from the perspective of the addressees, i.e., lay citizens, and attempts to equip them with critical questions which they can utilize in evaluating statements from experts. This approach has produced important and useful protocols for critical evaluation of expert statements. Its focus on the lay addressee realistically reflects the preoccupation which reliable experts may have with the reception of their statement by peer experts. Moreover, it speaks to an inescapable aspect of the topic: how can the enlightened lay citizen acquire something *she* can rely upon as knowledge from the statements of experts? Consequently, it makes sense to focus on *training* the autonomous citizens to critically evaluate expert statements.

This essay takes a different, though complementary, approach. Working from a normative pragmatic perspective on discourse design, it focuses on a specific communicative activity and product utilized in addressing expert statements to lay decision makers, viz., reporting and reports. Keeping in mind what we have gained by working to educate a critically aware addressee, this study directs attention to how reports from experts can be designed to enable critical and responsible appropriation by autonomous, plain citizens.

2. BACKGROUND

A normative pragmatic focus on the strategic design of expert reports complements some recent work on their critical reception by lay addressees. Jean Goodwin has called attention to a close fit between work in Argumentation Studies and in Studies of Expertise and Experience which focus on the capacities of lay audience to evaluate experts on the basis of the audience's social knowledge (2011a, p. 289). Social knowledge, in these views, is seen to be "ubiquitous," composed of "abilities that people acquire as they learn to navigate their way through life (Collins & Evans, 2007, p. 16, as cited by Goodwin, p. 289). Thus ordinary citizens can document the purported expert's experience, check the internal consistency of his statements, their external consistency with evidence, their "scientificness," and the trustworthiness of the expert's demeanor (Goodwin, 2011a, p. 289). Similarly, as Douglas Walton observes, argumentation textbooks advise citizens to examine a purported expert's experience, education, access to the topic, credentials, peer recognition, track record, lack of bias or interest, and internal consistency of judgments, as well as recency, consistency with other experts and consistency with other evidence (1997, pp. 199–229).

However, Goodwin doubts whether this convergence between argumentation studies and studies of expertise has provided a full account of how relevant social knowledge is to be applied in practice (2011a). Focus on the discursive design of expert reports may enrich understanding of how common social knowledge can be critically applied in assessment and appropriation of expert reports. Presumably experts and lay persons share much the same social knowledge. That being the case, it should be possible for this shared social knowledge to be applied by experts in designing reports which facilitate critical evaluation by lay persons. (Indeed, as we will see, some expert reports do realize this possibility, at least in part.)

Support for this approach can be drawn from Axel Gelfert's adaptation of Robert Brandom's conception of "conversational score-keeping" to facilitate application of lay social knowledge to the appraisal of expert statements (2011). In Brandom's view, participants in a "discursive practice"—including experts—implicitly and explicitly undertake and attribute various commitments and/or entitlements. By tracking the commitments undertaken by experts in their statements and the corresponding entitlements, Gelfert suggests, lay persons can gain footing for appraisal of those statements (2011, p. 307). Rather than defending conversational scorekeeping as the basis of a universal theory, Gelfert suggests:

[A] conscious effort at keeping track of one's interlocutor's (acknowledged and undertaken) commitments and entitlements, is a commendable strategy in dealing with appeals to expert opinion. Irrespective of whether conversational scorekeeping generalizes to all kinds of speech acts and conversation moves, it may have its most natural application in the context of appeals to an external epistemic authority. (p. 308)

In support of this suggestion Gelfert points to the ways in which commitments undertaken in connection with testimony afford basis for its appraisal (p. 308).

Gelfert's suggestion implies a promising approach to the problem(s) of lay appropriation of expert testimony. But where Gelfert focuses on orienting the lay audience to the commitments undertaken by experts in making statements, I propose a complementary focus on the production of those statements, specifically on the production of expert reporting and reports designed to facilitate lay evaluation of their epistemic merit on the basis of ordinary social knowledge. It may be that expert reports can be designed to facilitate what Gelfert calls "scorekeeping" by careful attention to how epistemically relevant commitments are undertaken and discharged in the production of expert reports.

3. THE NORMATIVE PRAGMATIC PLATFORM

My approach requires a relatively rich understanding of how commitments are undertaken in communicative acts and how those commitments both enable addressee evaluation of the speaker's discourse and potentially provide the addressee with reason for placing confidence in that discourse. For this understanding I turn to a normative pragmatic view of discourse, which seems complementary to Brandom's but proceeds from an "assurance account" of the pragmatics underlying H. P. Grice's analysis of utterance-meaning, i.e., seriously saying and meaning something.

A basic principle of assurance accounts is that in the primary communicative act of seriously saying and meaning something and in speech acts performed by means of this primary act, speakers deliberately and openly manifest the intentions which constitute their speech acts and thereby conspicuously make themselves accountable for their primary

communicative effort (Kauffeld, 2003, 2011; Moran, 2005; Stampe, 1967). Such manifestations of accountability are designed to provide addressees with assurance that the speaker is acting responsibly. The addressee is entitled to and intended to reason that the speaker would not make herself accountable for her communicative effort and, hence, risk resentment, retribution, etc., should she fail to live up to her openly incurred responsibilities. Given this presumption the addressee may find reason to respond as the speaker primarily intends.

In the primary case where speaking seriously and meaning what she says, a speaker says, e.g., that Uncle Bill has died, she openly and strategically takes responsibility for the veracity of her utterance. Accordingly, she makes herself inescapably vulnerable to criticism and resentment for mendacity should it turn out that she is speaking falsely. The speaker thereby generates a presumption of veracity on behalf of her utterance, which serves to provide her addressee with assurance that she is speaking truthfully. Given the speaker's openly incurred commitments, her addressee can reason (*ceteris paribus*) and is intended to reason that the speaker would not be manifestly willing to risk criticism for speaking falsely, were she not in fact speaking truthfully (Kauffeld, 2001; Stampe, 1967, 1975). This interpretation of the practical design underlying the constituents identified by Grice's analysis is a model of normative pragmatics. It exhibits the genesis of a normative obligation in a familiar communicative practice: in saying that *p*, the speaker openly incurs an obligation to speak truthfully. And it identifies the potential efficacy of that normative obligation, viz., by openly incurring an obligation to speak truthfully, the speaker generates reason to, e. g., believe what she says.

Variants of this basic assurance strategy for generating presumptions can be seen to be at work in the genesis of probative obligations in such speech acts as *accusing*, *proposing*, *praising*, etc. (Kauffeld, 1998, 2002). Similar strategies can also be seen to be at work in some communicative activities. Testifying and its product, testimony, provide examples similar to reporting and reports in some respects. Testimony is characteristically taken in the context of some larger inquiry involving serious decisions and/or judgments. Typically the situation is such that the recipient of the testimony (*TR*) needs to know something about a matter (*m*) to which he does not have direct access but which is (or may be) within the scope of the speaker providing the testimony (*TS*). Moreover, *TR*'s responsibilities are such that he cannot simply rely on *TS*'s presumed veracity; he needs to be able to test, as best he can, the grounds for her purported knowledge. Satisfying that need involves a breach in the trust which in normal circumstances would attend *TS*'s statements. To repair that breach, *TS* deliberately and openly speaks with the intention of answering *TR*'s questions regarding what *TS* knows about *m*, thereby manifestly consenting to being examined as to the grounds for her purported knowledge. At the same time, *TS* manifestly maintains her commitment to speak truthfully. By openly enlarging the commitments *TS* undertakes in saying what she knows regarding *m*, *TS* adjusts her discourse to accommodate *TR*'s need to examine her and also maintain an assurance of trust in what she says (Kauffeld & Fields, 2005). Our attention now turns to the discursive design of a somewhat similar communicative activity.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE DESIGN INHERENT IN THE COMMUNICATIVE STRUCTURE OF REPORTING

Like testimony, reports are produced in the course of a communicative activity, *reporting*. As with testimony, reports typically do their work in some larger activity involving decision, judgment, explanation and/or understanding. To apprehend the potentials for the discursive design of reports, we must first reflect on the dynamics of that activity. Within that dynamic we may then identify resources which can be used to enhance possibilities for lay critical reception of expert reports.

Reporting characteristically involves an authorization relating two (or more) parties. In its simplest paradigmatic structure, reporting involves some party (or parties) which authorize and ultimately receive the report. Let us designate the authorizing agent(s) and the party(s) to whom the report is addressed (*AA*)—as we will see the authorizing agent and the addressee may in many cases be distinct parties. Reporting further involves some party or parties who are authorized to investigate some matter (*m*) and provide *AA* with a statement of the results (findings) of that investigation, i.e., the report. Let us designate this party the investigator/reporter (*IR*)—noting again that the roles of investigator and reporter may fall to distinct parties. The situation in which reporting is undertaken typically has this structure:

- (1) *AA* needs to know (learn) something about *m*, and *AA* is for some reason unable or unwilling to investigate the matter (perhaps *AA* lacks the time, the resources, ability, and/or inclination to conduct the inquiry herself).
- (2) *AA* authorizes *IR* to investigate *m* and tell *AA* the results of that investigation.
- (3) *IR* subsequently conducts the investigations and reports her findings to *AA*.

This structure is apparent in the ways we talk about reports. In a great many cases it would make sense (where the matter not entirely clear) to ask who or what authorized this report. To characterize a report as ‘unauthorized’ would be to imply a criticism of that “report” and in many cases that criticism would bring into question the discourse’s claim to the status of a *report*.

From a normative pragmatic perspective, the fact that reports initially require a delegation of authority and responsibility is of considerable importance to the possibility of designing expert reports which can be assessed and interpreted by lay parties. Assurance accounts of the pragmatics of discourse direct our attention to those moments in a discourse in which commitments are manifestly undertaken in connection with the open identification of the intention/purpose constituting the central communicative act/activity (Jackson, 1992; Kauffeld, 2007). Commonly in connection with the activity of reporting those purposes and corresponding commitments are initially and openly identified in the course of delegating authority and responsibility for the investigation and preparation of the report. The construction of those purposes and corresponding commitments affords opportunities to design the activity of reporting in ways which can guide and give assurance of the production of well-founded reports which are intelligible to and can be evaluated by lay parties.

5. SITUATED DESIGNS FOR LAY-FRIENDLY EXPERT REPORTS

Strategic possibilities inherent in the delegation of authority and responsibility for designing lay-friendly expert reports can be identified in three of the many scenarios which give rise to

expert- to-lay reports. In the first scenario the lay parties (lay *AAs*) directly authorize expert parties (expert *IRs*) to investigate *m* and report directly to the lay *AAs*. In the second scenario the report is prepared under the aegis of some authorizing institution (*A*) which delegates responsibility to some experts or body of experts to investigate and prepare a report (expert *IRs*) on *m* which is addressed to other interested experts and to relevant lay parties. In the third scenario, a primary report has been prepared by expert *IRs*, typically under the direction of some institution, and a second mediating *IR*₂ undertakes to interpret the report to lay addressees. These scenarios afford parallel but distinct opportunities for designing reports which facilitate critical appropriation by lay parties.

Consider first a not entirely hypothetical case in which lay *AAs* authorize selected experts *IRs* to investigate a matter and to prepare a report to the lay *AAs*. A small college is experiencing sudden, welcome growth in enrollment and corresponding program expansion. It needs to more carefully utilize the limited available physical space for facilities construction. The college constitutes a campus master plan committee, including representatives from various campus constituents and interests, which is to prepare an overall plan for future facilities development. Lacking the expertise, time, and inclination, the committee delegates to architectural specialists the task of investigating and preparing a report recommending a master plan for the campus. Here the task of investigating a matter and preparing a report has been delegated by a knowledgeable lay body to a small group of experts. The delegating body will in turn be responsible for evaluating their report, advocating for some or all of its findings, and ultimately utilizing the report as a basis for campus development.

Within this elementary reporting structure, the delegation of authority can in principle be directly negotiated between the lay authorizing agent, *AA*, and the expert investigative/reporter, *IR*. From a message design perspective, this initial delegation can (and should) be seen as an opportunity to allocate obligations such that the expert *IR* is openly committed to producing a report which autonomous lay decision makers can responsibly utilize. Ideally, then, *IR* would deliberately and openly give it to be believed that her investigation and report will be directed by the intention to enable *AA* to make a sound determination regarding *m*. In our example, the campus planning experts would openly commit themselves to investigate the college's needs and opportunities and to providing the planning committee with a report which would enable the committee to formulate a well-conceived campus master plan. This commitment entails not only the duty of providing a well-founded report, but also a larger responsibility to put the committee in a position to evaluate and appropriate the report. Failure to fulfill the first duty would subject the *IR* to criticism for negligence; one would say that the report was "shoddy." Failure to fulfill the second would subject the *IR*'s report to criticism as regards its intelligibility; one would say that the report did not make sense. The supposition that *IR* would not invite the resentment attending either of these complaints provides *AA* with an initial presumption regarding the expert's trustworthiness and would provide partial reason to delegate investigation and preparation of the report to these expert *IRs* (Also see: Goodwin, 2011b).

This initial delegation affords the expert *IRs* preliminary opportunity to frame their task in terms which facilitate providing an intelligible report. The interaction between *AA* and *IR* has a potential to establish a mutual understanding of what *AA* wants to know regarding *m* and why and, also, of the scope of the inquiry expected of *IR* and of the methods *IR* is to employ. Thus, in our hypothetical case, *IR* would learn from *AA* the situation which gives rise to the latter's need for a campus master plan and some of the restraints under which *AA* is

working (the constituents, civic regulations, planning approval processes, etc.), and both can agree on the available best methods for conducting the inquiry. The extent to which this initial mutual determination of the case is possible will vary and may involve an extended conversation which corrects and adjusts previous understandings. The important point to notice here is that mutual understandings regarding rationale, scope and methods of the inquiry provide *AA* with subsequent basis for assessing and appropriating the expert's report and, importantly, provides *IR* with a framework for constructing a report which is both intelligible and assessable by the addressee. Such a report would conspicuously recall and address the initial mutual understandings regarding the rationale, scope, and methods of investigation delegated to *IR*. A report constructed along these lines does not relieve *AA* of responsibility to critically evaluate the expert's statements, but it would facilitate that evaluation. In many cases, reports constructed along these lines would open to an ongoing conversation between *AA* and *IR* which facilitates the former's critical appropriation of the latter's report.

Consider now the second scenario in which the report is prepared under the aegis of some authorizing institution (*A*) which delegates to some experts or body of experts (expert *IRs*) responsibility for investigating and preparing a report regarding *m*, which is to be addressed to other interested experts and to relevant lay parties. Here the allocation of responsibilities is more complex than in the case where lay parties directly authorize experts to investigate and report on some matter; nevertheless, negotiation of that allocation affords opportunities for designing discourse calculated to assure lay-friendly reports. *The Miller Lite Report on American Attitudes toward Sports* affords an opportunity to reflect on some of that complexity and the available design opportunities.

The Miller Lite Report on American Attitudes toward Sports (hereafter, the Miller Report) is the product of a comprehensive study authorized by the Miller Brewing Company presented to "the general public" in 1983 (Miller Brewing & Research and Forecasts). In the introductory pages, Miller Brewing represents the presentation of the report as a benevolent act, a contribution, designed to "help the American public know more about itself." William K. Howell, then President and Chief Operating Officer of Miller Brewing, explains Miller's motivation in the following terms.

It is logical for Lite beer from Miller to have commissioned this report because beer and sports go together in many ways. Many of American's sports fans are our consumers, and the Miller Brewing Company is becoming known as *the* sports company through sponsorship of sports broadcasts and thousands of events each year at all levels of competition. Few companies can claim such a close association with the world of sports and its millions of fans. (Miller Brewing & Research and Forecasts, 1983)

The report provided a platform for Miller's subsequent use of sports venues in very successful advertising campaigns (Sperber, 2001, pp. 39–40) and, as such, contains much in the way of precise data and interpretations of technical interest to Miller's marketing department. The report itself, however, is not addressed specifically to Miller's marketing and advertising experts; rather, it is openly addressed to a lay public and committed to assisting the public's self-understanding.

Given that commitment, the public is initially entitled to presume that Miller has authorized a report which may be well-founded, comprehensive and intelligible. The report's introductory discussion of its structure, methods, and aims reinforce that presumption. The preparation of the report, one is told, was under the supervision of an advisory panel consisting of distinguished scholars, physicians, and leaders qualified by their sports expertise. The study

itself was conducted and the report prepared by a staff of experts using the latest systematic survey methods. The study purports to have been designed to provide a “modern full-scale national survey of sports attitudes and practices in America today” which can therefore be useful in several ways. It can:

- probe the opinions Americans hold toward activities that permeate all aspects of our national life;
- open up new issues for popular discussion and provide fresh information for familiar concerns;
- establish a benchmark reference point for sports professionals, managers, journalists, and enthusiasts; and
- compare public attitudes toward sports issues with those held by sports journalists, coaches, and sports doctors. (Miller Brewing & Research and Forecasts, 1983, p. 2)

The report is not only explicitly committed to providing publicly useful knowledge; the scope of the inquiry is specified by an inventory of questions the Miller Report is to address, e.g., what activities do Americans define as “sport”? How much are Americans involved in sports, either as spectators or participants, on a weekly or daily basis? How closely are participation in and attendance at sports activities linked to the vitality of family life? Recalling public reports of serious misbehaviour in the sports world, how do the public and relevant experts view athletes as role models for children? etc. The introductory discussion of the structure, methods, aims and scope of the report strengthens the initial presumption that the report will provide reliable, intelligible, and useful information about American attitudes to sports.

The commitments openly undertaken in the Miller Report’s discussion of the delegation of responsibilities related to its production not only provide lay addressees with a reasonable basis for initially presuming that the report will provide information that is reliable, intelligible and useful from a lay perspective, it also puts the authors of the report in a position to conspicuously discharge the authorizing commitments. And, by the same token, it positions the lay reader to make a reasonable assessment of the adequacy of the report.

The Miller Report conspicuously attempts to discharge its initially incurred commitment to provide a report which can be appropriated by lay readers as reliable, intelligible, and useful. The overall organization corresponds one-to-one on a chapter-by-chapter basis to the initial set of questions the report is (purportedly) designed to answer. Throughout, the report provides an ongoing lay-friendly discussion of its methods. Technical data is routinely interpreted in ordinary terms. Material accessible only with an expert’s competence is relegated to appendices. In short, the report is structured such that lay persons can readily find their way through what is in fact a highly technical marketing study and can integrate into their thinking about sports in American life a presumptively reliable set of data and understandings.

In the third scenario a primary report has been prepared by expert *IR*₁s, typically under the direction of some institution, and a second mediating *IR*₂ undertakes to interpret the report to lay addressees. In this scenario the delegation of responsibilities and concomitant commitments is at once more complicated and simpler. Here we deal with two reports, the one originally prepared by experts and most likely primarily addressed to other experts; the other a report prepared by an intermediary agency which attempts to interpret the report (and its significance) for lay citizens. Nevertheless, here the possibilities for lay-friendly discourse design is fundamentally simple, and the potential for enabling critical appropriation of expert

reports by lay citizens is reflected in the ubiquitous presence of such secondary reports in our public discourse.

A wide range of journalistic strategies designed to negotiate this third scenario have been developed; detailed examination of their strengths and liabilities lies outside the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, a particularly nice specimen from National Public Radio's programming illustrates the potentials here for lay critical appropriation of expert reports. The NPR report "Should we kill the Dollar Bill?" which aired on April 19, 2012 and is now archived on the internet at Planet Money Blog, provides a secondary report addressed to the lay public as a report on responses to a Government Accountability Office Report which recommends switching from paper one dollar bills to dollar coins. NPR's report covers the GAO report, the lobbying controversy it spawned, and responses from relevant economic experts. The program is explicitly addressed to a lay public and is openly designed to enable their decision making (Benincasa & Kestenbaum, 2012).

National Public Radio presents reports of this kind as a publicly funded service. NPR, that is, represents itself as an agent supported by the public to provide citizens with, among other things, reports that enable citizens to responsibly execute their duties. Accordingly, when NPR offers a secondary report of this kind it has a standing public commitment under that broad obligation, and its listeners not only have opportunity to air views critical of NPR's discharge of that duty, they effectively avail themselves of that opportunity on a daily basis. It is reasonable to presume that NPR tries to fulfill its duties rather than suffer adverse criticism from its listeners—a presumption which is strengthened by NPR's practice of airing critical, and sometimes answering, listener criticism. How then does NPR frame "Should We Kill the Dollar Bill?" (hereafter, Dollar Bill Report) so as to enable responsible decision making on the part of autonomous citizens?

NPR focuses its report on the controversy generated by the GAO report recommending a switch from dollar bills to dollar coins. Speaking in its capacity as a publicly supported agent of its addressees, NPR openly presents its report as the product of an investigation calculated to get to the bottom of the matter. The inquiry and its product are manifestly designed to enable lay persons to make sense of the controversy and to arrive at a well-founded judgment. The report unfolds in three stages corresponding to stages in NPR's investigation: the first provides reasons for and against the change as presented by the GAO and contending parties; the second provides an analysis of the case for change from the perspective of economic experts; and the third stage briefly provides evidence which tends to confirm the analysis offered by a leading economic expert. This progression enables lay persons to appreciate the scope of the inquiry and to understand each stage as moving closer to a bottom-line decision. Each stage is framed in terms of the methods of inquiry NPR used at that stage, explicitly addressing questions regarding their appropriateness. Throughout NPR conspicuously represents its inquiry as conducted fairly, recognizing the special qualifications of the sources interviewed and the special interests of the contending parties.

In order to get to the bottom of the matter NPR critically and with manifest fairness attempts to balance and comparatively evaluate the arguments presented by the contending parties. The GAO's report recommends the switch to dollar coins, we are told by NPR, primarily on the grounds that the change would make the federal government some \$4.4 billion over the next thirty years. The change is supported by legislators who claim that coins are more efficient than paper dollars as evidenced by the experience of other countries which have made this kind of change. But NPR notes that these legislators represent constituents which have

substantial interests in the production of metal coins. On the other side, the legislators vigorously opposing the change maintain that the American dollar is far more durable than the paper currency of other countries and is, hence, an economical basis for currency transactions. These legislators, NPR notes, represent constituents which have substantial interests in the production of paper currency. To adjudicate the controversy NPR then turns to academic economists, including a key voice recommended by the advocates for a switch to coins. These economists point to a part of the GAO's report which acknowledges that the \$4.4 billion gain would come about as profit the government acquires because it makes money on the production of currency and would gain a profit from the need to produce more coins than bills because citizens leave coins lying about, out of circulation. Economists uniformly regard, we are told, this as a tax on the citizens (seigniorage), and, as one economist (scholar recommended to NPR by the pro-coin interests) tells the investigator (and us), "The government can make profits in all sorts of bad ways. People are going to be putting them (dollar coins) on top of their bureaus instead of spending them for transactions and that seems like a big waste of resources to me. This does not seem like a good way to raise money." To conclude its effort to reach the bottom of the matter, NPR presents independent evidence confirming the economist's judgment: in the past when Congress has tried to get the public to use dollar coins, the coins remain languishing in vaults because the public had rejected them. By implication, languishing in vaults is a good predictor of coins languishing on the tops of bureaus, confirming an expectation already conceded in the GAO's report.

The reports generated across the three scenarios discussed above share certain features designed to enable lay addressees to appropriate and evaluate statements produced by experts. These features are realized differently in each of the three reports discussed; nevertheless, they reflect a common underlying design. In all three the expert *IR* is openly committed to providing a report which enables lay *As* to understand and make decisions regarding *m*. In all three this commitment entails an effort to provide a report which is well-founded and intelligible to the lay *A*, which renders the expert *IR* vulnerable to criticism and resentment should negligent investigation and/or unintelligible findings emerge. Each report explicitly takes steps to enable lay addressees to interpret and evaluate the report and its findings; each provides a discussion of and justification for the methods used in the inquiry into *m*; each provides a discussion of the proper scope and importance of the inquiry; and each is organized in ways which explicitly connect discussion of the report's findings to its discussion of method, scope, and importance. Thus, each report enables the lay addressee to reasonably presume that the investigating expert is making a responsible effort to provide the lay addressee with an intelligible report and positions the addressee such that he can evaluate the report on the basis of its conformity to appropriate methods and proper scope.

5. CONCLUSION

This study directs attention to some ways in which reports produced by experts can be designed to facilitate their critical appropriation by self-reliant lay addressees. It has long been recognized that sound judgment and decision making by the latter often depends upon knowledge gained from the former, but the epistemic inferiority of lay agents can frustrate full comprehension of expert statements, impairing the capacity of lay agents to exercise self-reliant judgment. Standard approaches to this conundrum attempt to sharpen the critical skills which lay agents can bring to bear in evaluating expert statements. This essay points to

complementary possibilities inherent in the nature of reporting for structuring reports which invite critical evaluation and enable the exercise of self-reliant judgment on the part of lay addressees. The design possibilities identified here emerge in light of a general account of how commitments which are openly incurred in seriously saying things provide addresses with reason to presume that speakers are acting responsibly. The communicative act of reporting typically requires a delegation of authority to one party, *IR*, to investigate some matter and to report to another party, the authorizing addressee, *AA*. Executing such delegations requires identification of the purposes for the report and a corresponding set of obligations incumbent on the *IR*. Expert reports then can be authorized in terms which charge the expert *IR* with an obligation to enable sound judgment and understanding on the part of the lay *AAs*. Discharging that obligation requires the production of a report which is well-grounded and intelligible to lay *AA*. In connection with the delegation of authority to *IR*, the scope of the investigation, the questions to be answered, and the methods to be used can be specified. The report itself can be constructed along lines which conspicuously discharge the duties initially identified, enabling understanding and critical evaluation on the part of lay addressees. Three examples involving different scenarios illustrate these potentials for designing lay-friendly expert reports.

The present essay is designed to open the door on a matter which merits further and fuller investigation. No attempt has been made here to exhaust the range and kinds of commitments which can be explicitly built into reporting activities to assure competence and intelligibility of expert reports addressed to lay citizens. A good deal of productive work has been done on the critical questions lay citizens can use in evaluating expert statements. Argumentation and critical-thinking scholars should now ask how expert reports can be designed to respond to those critical questions. And the entire matter needs study in terms of some good understanding of what understanding lay decision makers must require in order to exercise autonomy with respect to their use of expert reports.

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